Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy

HIGHLIGHTS 2002/03

July 2003
revised September 2003

AADAC
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission
An Agency of the Government of Alberta

Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy – Highlights 2002/03 **July 2003**

INTRODUCTION

The challenge

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disability, disease, and premature death in Alberta.
- Nearly one-quarter of Albertans continue to smoke, while more than 3,400 Albertans die each year from tobacco-related causes.
- The estimated cost of tobacco use to the Alberta economy in 2001 was more than $2.8 billion per year in health care spending, reduced productivity, lost income, and property damage.

Alberta takes action

In April 2002, Alberta launched the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Strategy (ATRS), a comprehensive and coordinated health initiative that includes:

- Increased taxation on tobacco products
- Prevention and education programs
- Information and public awareness campaigns
- Legislation to prevent youth from smoking
- Help for smokers who want to quit
- Research and evaluation

ATRS goals

Increase the wellness of Albertans and decrease health care costs by:

- Reducing the number of young people starting to smoke
- Encouraging and helping current tobacco users to quit
- Reducing nonsmokers' exposure to secondhand smoke

Performance targets

The ATRS has established ambitious performance targets. The targets are to:

- Reduce the consumption of tobacco products in Alberta by 50% over the next ten years (Alberta Revenue annual statistics).
- Reduce the percentage of Albertans age 15+ who smoke from 25% in 2001 to 17.5% in 2011 (Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey).
- Reduce the percentage of youth age 15 —19 years who smoke from 24% in 2001 to 12% in 2011 (Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey).
- Reduce the percentage of women who smoke during pregnancy from 32% in 2000/2001 to 12% in 2010/2011 (Canadian Community Health Survey).

HIGHLIGHTS

ATRS Actions 2002/2003

The ATRS is based on a 2001 interdepartmental report, *Reducing Tobacco Use in Alberta: A Comprehensive Strategy*, which outlines six elements for action. The following is a progress report for the first year of implementation.

Element 1: Leadership and coordination

- AADAC developed the infrastructure to lead and coordinate the ATRS, including creation of a specialized Tobacco Reduction Unit.
- Internal and external advisory committees have been formed to guide the strategy and ensure a coordinated approach.
- Consultations are ongoing with Regional Health Authorities, non-governmental organizations, Aboriginal groups, the federal government, and other provinces.
- AADAC received $8.7 million for the ATRS, Alberta Revenue $1.5 million, and Alberta Gaming $1.5 million.

Element 2: Taxation as a prevention strategy

- Raising tobacco taxes is an effective way to reduce smoking, especially among youth.
- In March 2002, Alberta introduced the largest single tobacco tax increase in Canadian history. Alberta's tobacco taxes are now the highest in Canada.
- British Columbia and Saskatchewan have recently moved to match Alberta's tobacco tax structure, which will help control inter-provincial smuggling.

Element 3: Prevention and education

- AADAC is funding the following education programs for youth: Youth Action and Advisory Project (YAAP), Building Leaders for Action in Schools Today (BLAST), Teaming Up for Tobacco-Free Kids, and Kick the Nic.
- The Alberta Spit Tobacco Education Program has been launched.
- Alberta Learning has introduced a new anti-tobacco curriculum – the most comprehensive in Canada.
- AADAC has funded 40 Community Tobacco Reduction Projects throughout the province, including 25 grants to youth groups.
- In October 2002, AADAC launched a public awareness campaign in support of the ATRS.
- New programming has been implemented for National Non Smoking Week across Alberta.
- In January 2003, AADAC initiated implementation of major tobacco education programs for youth.
- Consultations leading to an Aboriginal Tobacco Use Strategy have been completed and an implementation plan is underway.

Element 4: Reduction and cessation

- A toll-free, province wide Smokers Help Line (1-866-332-2322) is receiving approximately 180 calls per month. Online counselling is provided and referrals made to existing cessation programs provided by Regional Health Authorities, such as the Alberta Lung Association's "Freedom From Smoking" program.
- AADAC has assigned 25 counsellors to work with community partners to build a province wide capacity for tobacco reduction.
- AADAC has funded five Regional Health Authorities to provide smoking cessation programs for pregnant women.

Element 5: Research and evaluation

- AADAC has developed a research framework to guide the ATRS and ensure evaluation and performance monitoring.
- Population health surveillance on tobacco use in Alberta has been undertaken in coordination with Health Canada and Alberta Health and Wellness.
- Evaluations of the ATRS social marketing campaigns have been completed to determine the exposure and effectiveness of these mass media campaigns.
- A public opinion survey of 3,000 adult Albertans has been completed to assess awareness and views on various tobacco-related issues and strategies.
- Information activities have been ongoing, and include distribution of best practices, research and evaluation findings, development of the AADAC *Tobacco Basics Handbook*, consultation and education services, and participation in local, national and international tobacco research meetings to share findings and develop knowledge of tobacco control research and strategies in other jurisdictions.

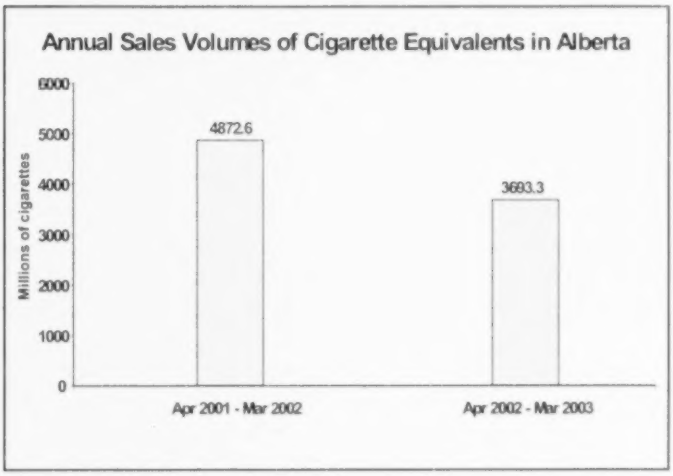
Element 6: Legislation to restrict access and exposure

- The Provincial Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act took effect April 1, 2003. The Act prohibits youth under 18 from possessing, using, or consuming tobacco products in public places.
- Eighteen municipalities have adopted 100% smoke free bylaws that are currently protecting one-third of the province's population from secondhand smoke in public places. In total, 70 communities have to date enacted some form of bylaw restricting smoking in public places covering 75% of Albertans.

ATRS RESULTS – Major progress

First Year Statistics

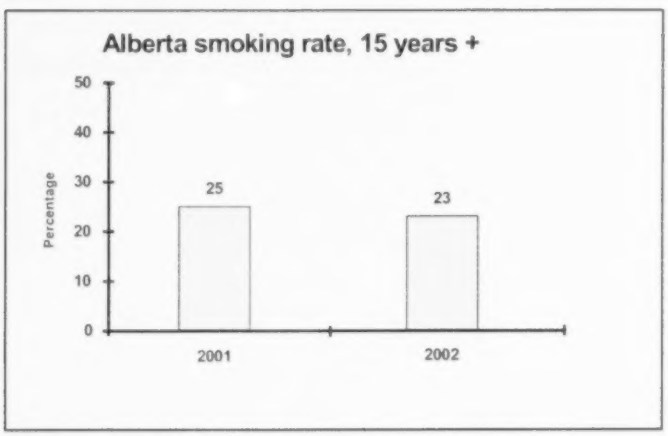
Early results are promising. According to Alberta Revenue, sales in Alberta of cigarettes and cigarette equivalents (custom cut cigarettes and loose cut tobacco) have seen a major decrease.



There has been a 24% decrease in sales volumes of cigarettes and cigarette equivalents in Alberta from fiscal year 2001/2002 to fiscal year 2002/2003.

Source: Alberta Revenue

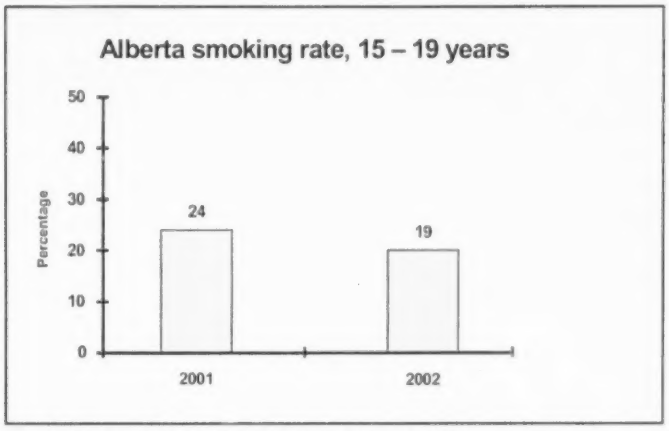
The prevalence of smoking among Albertans age 15+ years declined slightly from 25% in 2001 to 23% in 2002, according to the 2001 and 2002 Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Surveys.



In 2001, 25% of Albertans age 15 years and older smoked. In 2002, 23% reported smoking. This overall 2% decrease in the number of Albertans who smoke is equivalent to approximately 44,000 fewer smokers, and represents an 8% reduction in the rate of smoking.

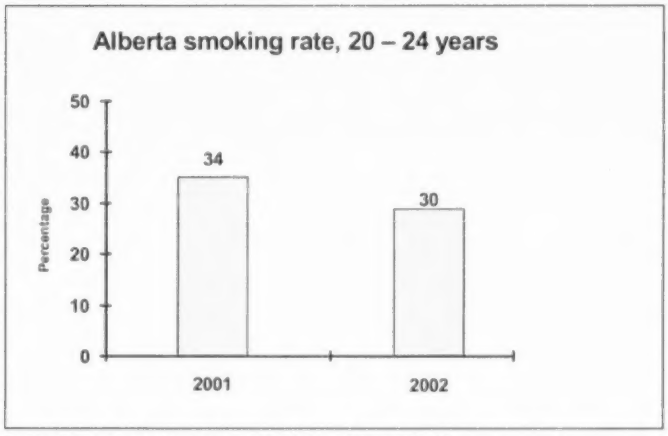
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey 2001, 2002

Smoking rates for the ATRS target groups of youth and young adults have also decreased.



Source: Statistics Canada. Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey 2001, 2002

In 2001, 24% of youth age 15 to 19 smoked. In 2002, the rate dropped to 19%, a 5% overall reduction in smoking among this age group. This represents a 21% reduction in the rate of smoking for youth.



Source: Statistics Canada. Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey 2001, 2002

In 2001, 34% of young adults (20 – 24 years old) smoked. In 2002, the rate dropped to 30%, a 4% overall reduction in the smoking rate in this age group. This represents an 11% reduction in the rate of smoking for young adults.

Tobacco contraband low

Smuggling of tobacco products into and out of Alberta remains low because of comparative tax regimes. Off-reserve movement of non-taxed tobacco contraband has likely increased somewhat as average monthly claims under the Alberta Indian Tax Exemption Act have increased from under $1 million in 2001 to $3.5 million in 2002.

Initial cost savings of $200 million

A reduction in the smoking rate in Alberta from 25% in 2001 to 23% in 2002 represents an estimated annual cost savings to the Alberta economy of approximately $200 million. This is a 17:1 return on the Alberta Government's initial investment of $11.7 million in the ATRS.

- Based on US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) methodology (Annual Smoking-Attributable Mortality, Years of Potential Life Lost, and Economic Costs, April 2002), the annual smoking-attributable cost per smoker in Alberta is $4,650.
- The CDC estimates include smoking-attributable medical expenditures for adults and infants, and economic productivity costs for adults.
- A two-percentage point reduction in the Alberta smoking rate is equivalent to approximately 44,000 fewer smokers.
- This represents an estimated annual costs savings to the Alberta economy of approximately $200 million.

Public awareness campaign successful

According to an Ipsos Reid evaluation of the ATRS radio and television Social Marketing Campaign (February – March, 2003), AADAC's tobacco reduction ads are reaching Albertans and the message is being heard.

- Total recall of the ATRS Social Marketing Campaign radio and TV ads was 94%. This means that 9 out of 10 Albertans can remember, or recall the ATRS advertisements.
- Total recall of the ATRS ads is similar among current smokers (95%), former smokers (94%), and nonsmokers (93%).
- 76% of Albertans reached by the campaign said that it was effective at raising public awareness about the negative effects of tobacco use.

Barb Tarbox's impact

After being diagnosed in September 2002 with terminal cancer caused by smoking, Barb Tarbox dedicated the remainder of her life to talking to young people about the dangers of smoking. Barb Tarbox's support and participation in the ATRS social marketing campaign resulted in much higher than expected reach and message resonance.

- 77% of Albertans recall seeing the Barb Tarbox ads without help or prompting.
- Special memorial awards were presented in Barb's name at World No Tobacco Day celebrations in May 2003.

Public support strong

According to the AADAC 2003 Public Opinion Survey completed by Criterion Research, most Albertans support government action to reduce tobacco use. A total of 3,000 telephone interviews were conducted with randomly selected Albertans, age 18 years or older, from January 20 – February 8, 2003.

- 91% of Albertans agree that tobacco is a dangerous, cancer-causing substance.
- 88% of Albertans agree that smoking should be banned in places where children are allowed.
- 86% of Albertans agree that secondhand smoke poses a serious threat to the health of non-smokers.
- 82% of Albertans agree that tobacco has no safe level of use and that most people do not fully understand the negative effects of tobacco use.
- 77% of Albertans support the use of TV ads to prevent young people from smoking.
- 72% of Albertans agree with making it against the law for youth under 18 to smoke.
- 65% of Albertans agree that tobacco reduction strategies in Alberta should be increased.

CONCLUSION

Alberta's first year implementation of its tobacco reduction strategy has been very successful and cost-effective. Best practices research shows sustained support of tobacco reduction programs and services is critical to further reduce tobacco use.

- The current Alberta smoking rate (23%) is still higher than the Canadian average (21%).
- In 1997, British Columbia became the first Canadian province to implement a similar, comprehensive strategy focusing on youth prevention. Today, B.C. has the lowest smoking rate in Canada (16%).
- California introduced the first comprehensive sustained tobacco reduction strategy in North America in 1988 and has succeeded in reducing smoking rates substantially. In 1988, 27% of adult Californians smoked; by 1998 the rate had dropped to 18%.